The university museum as a social enterprise

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Resumo

Coleccionar e guardar objectos são actividades humanas básicas e importantes para a manutenção da nossa qualidade de vida. Consequentemente, os museus devem ser considerados empresas com fins lucrativos em que o lucro é de natureza social. Este lucro social, objectivo último dos museus, deve ser perseguido de forma consitente. São três as chaves para a obtenção de lucros sociais: 1) a utilização de objectos reais e de novas tecnologias; 2) a criação de uma visão poderosa; e 3) melhoria do capital social. Os museus universitários são, pela sua natureza, ideais para a melhoria do capital social através do aprofundamento das suas diferentes dimensões, do desenvolvimento de bons projectos académicos e públicos, da melhoria da sua imagem pública e do estabelecimento de laços com a comunidade próxima. Com as suas colecções, investigação, ensino e programas públicos, os museus universitários encontram-se numa posição única para se tornarem as melhores empresas sociais das nossas comunidades.

Abstract

Collecting and keeping objects is a basic human characteristic that is important for improving the quality of our lives. As a result, museums are 'social enterprises' that have as an ultimate operational objective – a bottom line – a positive social outcome. Museums must demonstrate that these outcomes are being achieved on a consistent basis. There are three important keys for museums to achieve positive social outcomes: 1) using real objects and new technology, 2) creating a powerful vision, and 3) improving social capital. University museums are ideally suited to improve their social capital by increasing their dimensions, developing strong academic and public programs, improving their images, and connecting with their communities. With their collections, research, teaching, exhibits and public programs, university museums are uniquely positioned and qualified to be among the best of all social enterprises in our communities.

Introduction

Museums are one of the oldest and most public institutions of our society. The reason for this is that for many thousands of years, people have had a habit of making collections. Not only do we create and use material objects on a scale never seen before, we also study them intensively and collect them passionately (THOMPSON 1998). This appears to be a basic human need for improving the quality of our

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lives. People are acquiring, keeping, and handing on objects to subsequent generations because it also gives them a pleasurable and worthwhile experience. Our museums are the ultimate totems of this trait. We might as well have called ourselves Keeper man (or woman)-*Homo collector* – instead of Wise man – *H. sapiens* (TIRRELL 1994). Hundreds of millions of objects such as geological and biological specimens, anthropological and historical artifacts, artworks, and archives have been collected and are housed or displayed in museums. In America's museums, for example, you can find everything from the guns with which Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy were shot to last year's computers, from Mongolian dinosaurs to butterflies from Fiji. We have museums dedicated to things such as pretzels, mushrooms, barbed wire and medical leeches. Everything is being saved and collected (THOMPSON 1998).

University museums and collections also are among the oldest and most significant in the world. They can be traced back to the 17th century or even earlier (BOYLAN 1999). They have documented the diversity and history of life on earth and provided the basis for ongoing research and teaching activities to the world's scientific and cultural communities. University museums, such as the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (SNOMNH), The University of Oklahoma, are actively collecting thousands of artifacts and specimens each year. The university museum collections are a shared legacy of inestimable value and the foundation for interpreting our world and they are more than repositories of inspiration and memory-they are a constantly working and growing database.

Museums, including university museums, also may provide people with a wide variety of additional benefits or 'social capital' that flows from the museum mission and mindset. Typically, you find the phrase "something for everybody" in materials or media that advertise museums. For example, visiting museums and their exhibits is a highly popular way to spend time with relatives and friends, a form of family bonding and networking. According to the American Association of Museums, more people attend museums every year than attend all professional sporting events in the United States (US). Moreover, visitors from all backgrounds, races, education and economic status can have a meaningful experience in a museum. In addition, some museum buildings are among our most beautiful and permanent structures. They can provide a sense of connection, safety, and stability.

Shared Challenges and Concerns

University museums share common threats and challenges regarding the importance of their collections and their ability to provide social capital. MCLEOD (2000) poses a series of highly sobering questions about university museums and their future. One of the most provocative is, "Are we seeing the last gasps of an obsolete institution which is no longer delivering the goods...?" The "goods" in his view, are the contributions that museums should make to improve the basic quality of life (TIRRELL 2001a). This is the essential role of museums.

University museums may be losing out in an arena of fierce competition with a conglomerate of other providers of quality life, or 'social enterprises' such as theme parks and sports clubs. A good example may be the Museu del Futbol Club Barcelona President Nunez, one of the most famous and successful sports clubs in the world. On a daily basis, there may be

thousands of visitors to the Club's stadium, sports museum, sales shop, restaurant, and daily fanfare of activities. All the social enterprises are facing a new set of public expectations (Weil 2000). There are two overarching concerns by which museums (and the others) are being judged. First, that the museums are competent to achieve their intended outcomes and positively affect the quality of individual and communal lives and, second, that the museums employ their competence so that the outcomes are achieved on a consistent basis. Outcomes are benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in museum activities. Outcomes may relate to knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, behavior, condition, or other attributes (Weil 2000). These are qualitative goals that the museum can realistically expect to achieve. Social enterprises such as museums need to be efficient, and effective in achieving their desired outcomes. However, the museums can only be judged in relationship to what it is trying to accomplish. The amount of attendance and income only tell part of the story. At the SNOMNH, for example, since opening a new facility on May 1, 2000, over 465,303 people have visited the museum. The museum's curators also have generated $2,070,369 of research grants in the past three years. The attendance figures and grant dollars provide the museum and the university with a measure of quantitative production. However, they provide little in the way of knowing how effective the museum has been in adding to the quality of people's lives.

Technological advances associated with virtual reality also may be a major threat to museums. In the future, will virtual reality provide a sensory experience with objects that will be superior to anything the museum can provide (McLeod 2000)? Museums can only give a limited experience with the object (e.g., it is almost always removed form its original context and function). As a result, there is a possibility that children may spend even more time indoors, clicking away on their plastic mice, viewing virtual images of the plants, animals, people, treasures and solar systems (Wilcove & Eisner 2000).

A universal complaint is that university museums are under-funded and under-staffed. Museum science has contributed greatly to the tasks of preservation, conservation and restoration of all material objects. However, it has not succeeded in driving down the price of these functions, and the opposite is probably true (Thompson 1998). Faced with uncertainties of funding and the need to rely more and more on increasing support from outside the academic community, university museums are at risk of compromising their traditional mission of investigations, inquiry and challenge. Today's museums now find themselves forced to reconcile the competing functions of marketing and mission (Schwarzer 1999). However, the need for the museums to reassert their intellectual vigor and remain in the forefront of interdisciplinary dialogue has never been greater (Willumson 2000).

University museums of natural history appear to have some of the greatest challenges due to failing facilities and changes in research, teaching and public interest (Tirrell 2000a, 2001a). Nearly all university museums need quality space to house and protect their collections and to meet their need for research, teaching and public services. The major issue facing virtually all established natural history museums is the repair and renewal of their physical plants (Goldstein 1997). For example, as funding shifted from taxon-based subjects, such as systematics, to functional themes, such as behavior or ecology, the museums were disenfranchised and delegated to the

fringe of the university's academic interests. The de-institutionalization of university natural history museums looms as one of the biggest scientific mistakes of our time. In addition to collections, teaching, research, exhibits and interpretation, what's at stake is the continued vibrancy of biodiversity, ecology, of animal behavior and botany, of much of molecular biology, and even medicine and biotechnology (WILCOVE & EISNER 2000). The public's interests and support moved away from static displays such as habitat dioramas to more interactive and hands-on interpretation such as discovery rooms (TIRRELL 2000b).

University Museums also face a fundamental challenge of leadership and management. Most museum directors, trained as scientists, are unprepared to deal with the corporate challenges of redefining and reinventing the whole museum (TIRRELL 2000a). The directors and their staffs struggle to manage the problems, benefit from the successes, create strategies for solutions, and articulate a plan that shows the value of their museums to their superiors and supporters (BOYD 1995, GENOWAYS 1999, TIRRELL 2001b). Bureaucrats at the university also posed threats to their museums (MARES 1999).

When university museums have been under siege and stress for a long time, they may lack vision. In my experience, the museums often become fragmented activity traps with areas of excellence, but with no singular direction or purpose. Different groups of staff such as curators carve out niches of opportunity and perform well within comfort zones of limited dimensions. These comfort zones and the groups that operate in them develop a highly limited view of their museum world, and they resist accepting that change is urgently and immediately required. One of the greatest challenges facing the museum is a need to create a new multidimensional vision for the museum's future.

Seeking Solutions

I think that museums should make a quality contribution to society. Why should we take the trouble and spend the funds to preserve and showcase something that has is of little value to our lives? If our museums are not being operated with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of peoples' lives, on what other basis might we possibly ask for public support (WEIL 2000)? The essence of the arguments in favor of public funding for museums rests on the assumption that their collections exist for the public benefit. With funding, public access becomes an inalienable right (STOTT 2000).

When businesses fail, they usually cease to exist. Nonprofits such as museums, on the other hand, can become moribund institutions living for decades on endowment proceeds, government support, or in the case of university museums, anemic rations and airy promises, while producing little of real value. The lesson is not about sustainability or survival, but what it takes to succeed again and again, over an extended period of time (DUREL 1999). Ultimately, however, there are no safety nets for worn-out and out-dated institutions. Major university museums in the US and other countries are in danger of closing and their collections being moth-balled.

What will it take to succeed as a social enterprise? How can museums develop techniques and creative strategies to be efficient and effective in meeting new economic and social challenges? What are the keys to improving their social capital? In order to be successful, I suggest that university museums must

do three things: 1) they must reestablish the powerful qualities of objects in their collections and construct a vision with greater dimension; 2) they also need to deal with interactive technology in a positive way; 3) in addition, they must increase their social capital or net worth to society. The museums also may need to sharpen their distinctions to achieve their greatest efficiency, effectiveness, and value.

Reaffirming Objects as the Central Focus

In recent decades, museums have tried to become more responsive to the public by shifting from the presentation of real things to the production of experiences, switching from object centered to people centered exhibits. Design and spectacle have become central elements of display (Hein 2000). Boundaries between museums and the "real" world are becoming eroded. However, the world's social, economic and educational climates are ripe for distance education. Do university museums, as global social enterprises, really need to debate the value of 'high touch' *vs.* 'high tech' interpretation? A more pertinent question is how will the university museums respond to the explosion of distance, digital learning, and how will that fundamentally affect the way the museum positions itself in the educational marketplace? I view the future technology as an opportunity, not a threat. Interactive technology (IT) is a wondrous tool that museums can use to improve the quality of interpretation and research. Museums need to apply technology wisely (Tirrell 2001a). In planning the exhibits for the new SNOMNH, we decided to eliminate a general orientation theatre in favor of putting more objects such as dinosaur specimens on exhibit, a switch of $2.5 million. However, we kept a smaller theatre that focused on one specific exhibit of archeology and Native American pre-history that required special effects of IT to be successful. We also made a conscious decision to display articulated fossil skeletons and not to display fleshed out roaring, moving, dinosaur robots. We believed that to do so would deflect the museum's educational, ethical and aesthetic role.

What museums do best is deal with objects. Audiovisuals, for example, are better done by the museums' competitors such as movies in theatres. Movies and theaters are great, but they are not museums. Using wide-screen cinema, robotic dinosaurs, and virtual reality you can establish a very convincing transition from representation to reality (Asma 2001). Can university museums compete with movies such as *Jurassic Park*? The answer is yes, and they can do it better than any other museums. Their mission makes them uniquely qualified. There are good reasons for this. As I indicated, the trait that distinguishes us a species is our habit of acquiring, keeping, and handing objects on to subsequent generations. This habit appears to stem from a curiosity about our environment that leads us on an ongoing evolutionary path of investigation, documentation, organization, and interpretation – research and teaching – of our natural world (Tirrell 1994). Curiosity may be at the root of our collecting habit and perhaps we should be called *Homo curious* instead of *H. sapiens* or *H. collector*. Curiosity is the basis for much scientific wonder and inquiry. When real objects from museum collections are placed in the hands of university students, complex concepts such as biodiversity and extinction can become clear. Fossils, feathers, shells and insects can fire the imagination as they are touched, sorted, and discussed. Working with collections also helps us develop critical thinking

skills and problem-solving abilities as we move from concrete to abstract. For example, Stephen Asma expressed this in his book *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*. "To have a concept [...] is to have its negations already in tow[...] There is a class of things called 'dog' and there is a class of things [...] that are 'not-dog' [...] Language and thought cannot really function without this most basic tool for carving up reality" (ASMA 2001: 84). Universities and their museums are uniquely prepared to advance the role of curiosity in our society. By their mission, they are vital centers of scientific learning and are collaboratively involved in research, collecting, teaching, dissemination of information, and public service. They are places where science is done and innovation is taking place.

I think objects will be the source of inspiration and creative thought as long as we collect them (TIRRELL 2001a). "Is it real?" is the question I hear most often from children in the museum. No child wants to be disappointed by a fake, no matter how good the virtual tour. Science has been particularly useful in making the inventories of museum more accessible through electronic means, and we are just on the edge of broad access to images and information of museum objects. However, nothing electronic will substitute for the real thing. An electronic image of a bee wing can be transmitted across the world and provide an identification. But no reproduction of the Louvre's Winged Victory of Samathrace can substitute for the real object (THOMPSON 1998). In addition, let's leave something to imagination! Dinosaurs, for example, are more popular that ever thanks to new discoveries, new theories and new technologies. A museum display may only show a few bones and teeth of Dinosaurs. Are dinosaurs less or more intriguing because we *don't* show the whole animal? A university museum such as the SNOMNH offers many exciting opportunities for answers. For example, you may enter the Museum's Global Millenium Dinosaur Art Contest and Exhibit or you may become a student at OU and work side-by-side with internationally recognized paleontologists (TIRRELL 2001a). If art is the only way to run away without leaving home, then science is the only way to explore the universe without traveling in space.

Adding Dimensions to the Vision

Visionary museums will need a compulsive drive for progress and a mix of self-confidence and self-criticism or assessment. They will need to make bold moves combined with an inner drive to change before the outside world demands it. Successes may come through experimentation, opportunism, and accident. This resembles how natural species evolve and adapt to their environments. Through a process of variation and selection, organizations, much like species, can be well positioned to prosper in an ever-changing environment (DUREL 1999). In order to jump start this motive for change a clear sense of why it is urgent to change still needs to be generated as a first step in refining the process. Most university museums of natural history face a series of sobering questions. Each museum should ask itself questions such as what will happen if the drop-in visitor and other service levels continue to decline? What will happen if the university no longer sees the museum as an asset to the university? What unusual or unique opportunities are there for the museum to create partnerships? It is out of a sense of urgency, even horizon threat, that staff, administration, the university and public community may be shocked into exploring new options and creating a more promising vision.

The Genius of AND

University museums need to be highly progressive in their academic and their public mission. They need to adopt The Genius of AND and avoid the Tyranny of the OR (Collins & Porras 1997). This is the tendency to see choice as either A or B, for example, seizing new opportunities or staying true to mission. In the case of university museums of natural history in the US, they may see the choices as becoming either a museum with collection and a research and teaching function or a public education museum with a vastly reduced collections and research and teaching function. In fact, museums in the US have made or may soon be making this choice. However, by embracing the Genius of AND, visionary museums have found ways to have both A and B by creating a third choice where the preservation of the core mission and the drive for progress enable, complement and reinforce each other (Durel 1999). Use of basic research is an integral and necessary part of the university museum's exhibit program because accurate interpretation requires scholarly research. The academic research drives the exhibits and public programs. This is one of the most distinguishing and peerless features of university museums. For example, the SNOMNH has developed a two-pronged, long range, strategic plan to carry out its dual role as both a university and a state museum (Tirrell 2001b). The plan is to achieve equally high level of academic excellence and public service to keep the museum in an advantageous position with the University of Oklahoma and the State of Oklahoma. Both support the high priority for the stewardship of collections. The plan has worked and has been a key to the success of the SNOMNH in obtaining a new state-of-the-art facility at a cost of $45 million dollars. The SNOMNH has 14 Ph.D. faculty curators that are among the most productive researchers and teachers on the University's campus. The museum also has professional staff that have created and developed permanent, temporary and traveling exhibits, classes and workshops, outreach material and kits, and special events. The curators and staff worked together to design and produce nearly 45,000 square feet of exhibits for the new museum building.

Fig. 1 – A young visitor compares his teeth to those of *Saurophaganax maximus* on display at the SNOMNH (Photo by Ann Sherman, courtesy of SNOMNH).

Shape and Create Values with a Synthesis of Ideas

In addition to serving as vital centers of scientific research in areas such as biodiversity and ecology,

university natural history museums may need to be understood as institutions that can explore themes in social, cultural, and political arenas. As suggested by MACDONALD (1998), the museums can tell important stories about nationhood, progress, modernity, and even race. In planning for the future, universities and their museums may need to pose questions such as: What is the point of convergence of the museum's subject matter and social needs and agendas regarding stewardship of the environment? and What is the responsibility of the graduates of the museum's university to be the first generation of global citizens and the urgency that causes in the environmental education fields? Museums also can provide synthesis and order to the world. Every object in a collection has its story. Once a collection is made, almost by definition, the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts, and the value of each part has appreciated (THOMPSON 1998). The poet T. S. Elliot described Hell as a place "where nothing connects with nothing" (in reference to Dante's *Inferno*). The condition of disorientation, anxiety, and isolation, has long been noted as a distinctive liability of modern intellectual life. Nonetheless this threat seems to have reached its epitome in the explosion and fragmentation of information caused by our new technology (GREGORIAN 1992). There is a need to create sound synthesis and systematization of knowledge. This will require a kind of scientific genius which hitherto has existed only as an aberration – the genius for integration (GASSET 1944). University museums, which operate over great spans of time and have the widest audience of any other type of museum or social enterprise, are ideally suited to provide a comprehensive interpretation of our world. The university museums have unique advantages such as scholars, libraries, researchers, students, and global connections to make it happen. University-based research, for example, is highly responsive to societal needs as a perusal of Nobel Prize recipients makes clear. Most research in biodiversity, for example, has been carried out in universities, often at their museums of natural history. Freestanding museums are only bit players in the large questions concerning biodiversity and its ecology, distribution, and preservation (MARES & TIRRELL 1998).

Improving the University Museum's Social Capital

University museums have the opportunity to provide the highest level of social capital. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. The term social capital emphasizes a wide variety of benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital works through channels that include, but are not limited to, information flows, bonding and bridging networks, collective action and developing broader identities and solidarity. These are ideal channels for university museums to improve their social capital. Most university museums have a dual mission to serve their academic community and the general public. However, they often serve the public by popular demand, whether they want to or not (WILLIAMS 1969, NICHOLSON 1971). For example, the university's priorities focus on students, teaching, research, extramural grants, athletics and dissemination of information. The public's interests include exhibits, programs, outreach, and entertainment. Additional audiences such as special interest groups may want an attraction that boosts the local economy (TIRRELL 1991). Museums can become a pathway of communication and learning. The Museum can also be a bridge builder for the cultural, medical and physical sciences. In addition, the museum can have specific roles as a nexus and showpiece for the

Fig. 2 - Billie Ruth Hoff, a member of the Caddo Tribe, is one of many Native Americans who helped plan exhibits for the SNOMNH (Photo by Bob Taylor, courtesy University of Oklahoma).

University. In a global arena, university museums can take advantage of networks such as the International Committee for University Museums and Collections (UMAC). UMAC can help its members exchange and reformat their success stories for the benefit of all.

Improving the Image

Museums do share many characteristics with monuments to the dead. They are often places housing ancient remains where visitors fall silent, and curators may be compared to priests, controlling access to arcane knowledge (CURTIS 2000). In my experience, for example, some university museums of natural history are no longer interesting or inviting. Typical comments by visitors such as "It's very dark, old, and tired." and "It's good when you're really bored" describe them as unexciting and depressing places (HERMAN 1997: 4). Their habitat dioramas, for example, were innovative, instructive and highly popular exhibits in their heyday. However, viewing dead animals behind glass is a lot less appealing and acceptable now than it was a century ago when the displays had a magnetic and exotic quality. Many museums have yet to decide the role, if any, of their dioramas in the future. In an attempt to deal with this question, some museums have tried to upgrade the diorama experience by adding enhancements such as new graphics, labels and audiovisuals (e.g.

animal sounds) and replacing the glass fronts with rail barriers. They have tried to bring dead animals back to life. At the SMOMNH, we have created new state-of-the-art exhibits that are attractive, interpretive and interactive. At the SNOMNH, new 'immersion' or walk-through dioramas were designed with hands-on specimens. Even when museums have developed new visions and mission, they must work hard at improving their visual image. Many features of a college campus and of a university museum may have no explicit role in the educational mission of the university. However, *nearly* (ital. mine) every college president knows that a beautiful campus is as important as a first rate facility (GUMPRECHT 2001) in recruiting students staff and faculty, pleasing alumni, and attracting donations.

In planning a new facility for the SNOMNH, we spent a great deal of time in creating a building that would improve the image of the museum. Our previous museum complex was an ancient group of rickety old buildings, some of which had served as horse barns and had a burn-down time of 8 minutes or less. The design of the new facility for the SNOMNH was strongly influenced by our desire to make it appealing so that the people who supported it would feel welcome to visit their museum. Many people have a personal stake in its success through their gifts or volunteerism. It was important to us that every member of our potential audience be attracted to the building and feels welcome before and after entering it. We held focus groups, we canvassed alumni, we met with politicians and civic leaders, and we had an advisory group that represented the university and another that represented the people of the state. We also invited participation from special interest groups such as the Native American nations and tribes. They formed a Native American Advisory Committee that worked with us in planning and designing our exhibits. This not only improved the accuracy and interpretation of the exhibits but also provided a high level of networking and bonding with the nations and tribes.

Connect with the Needs of the Communities

University museums are ideally situated to connect with their communities. In many ways, the campus is the center of life in the community, much as the central business district was in the pre-automobile city or the shopping mall is in present-day suburbia. University communities may have many things that are attractive and important to the quality of people's lives such as galleries and exhibits, restaurants, bookstores, recreational facilities, concert halls, sports stadiums, park-like green spaces and events. Campuses often function like self-contained cities. They are a hub of activities that serve not only students and staff, but also the larger population of a town and region. Thus, the campus serves as both an environment for learning and as a public space (GUMPRECHT 2001). University museums also provide leading scholars and experts who are role models in many fields of research, from biodiversity to art history. The museums train the scholars, leaders, and professionals of the future. However, the university museums can do a better job of learning what the community needs or wants, and fitting the museum to those needs (DANA 1999). For example, society is clamoring for an interface between the scientists and the people. What institution other than the university natural history museum is more ideally suited to meet this demand? University museums can take a primary role in meeting the need for public understanding of science, a top agenda item for many universities across the world.

Sporting events are another way to connect with communities in a highly popular way. Sporting activities draw more than a million people to the OU campus each year. In response, the SNOMNH is planning an exhibition of OU football highlighting the Sooners National Championship wins. "OU football has been a source of tremendous pride to Oklahomans," commented a well known sportscaster. "The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is a perfect venue for this exhibit." OU President David Boren lent his enthusiastic support to the exhibition: "This exhibit lets us combine two winners on the OU Campus, OU Football and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, to entertain and inform the public about the rich history of football at this University, while affording them a chance to visit and appreciate our wonderful Museum of Natural and Cultural History. This will be a highlight exhibit this fall and I hope everyone will take the opportunity to see it."

Why should the SNOMNH create an exhibit about American football? The Museum will make an important connection with its community and the exhibit will attract an audience that other wise may never visit the Museum. A previous exhibit in 1986 was crowded on a daily basis and was extended for three months with the encouragement of the local and University communities. The exhibit will be popular with OU alumni, donors, supporters and

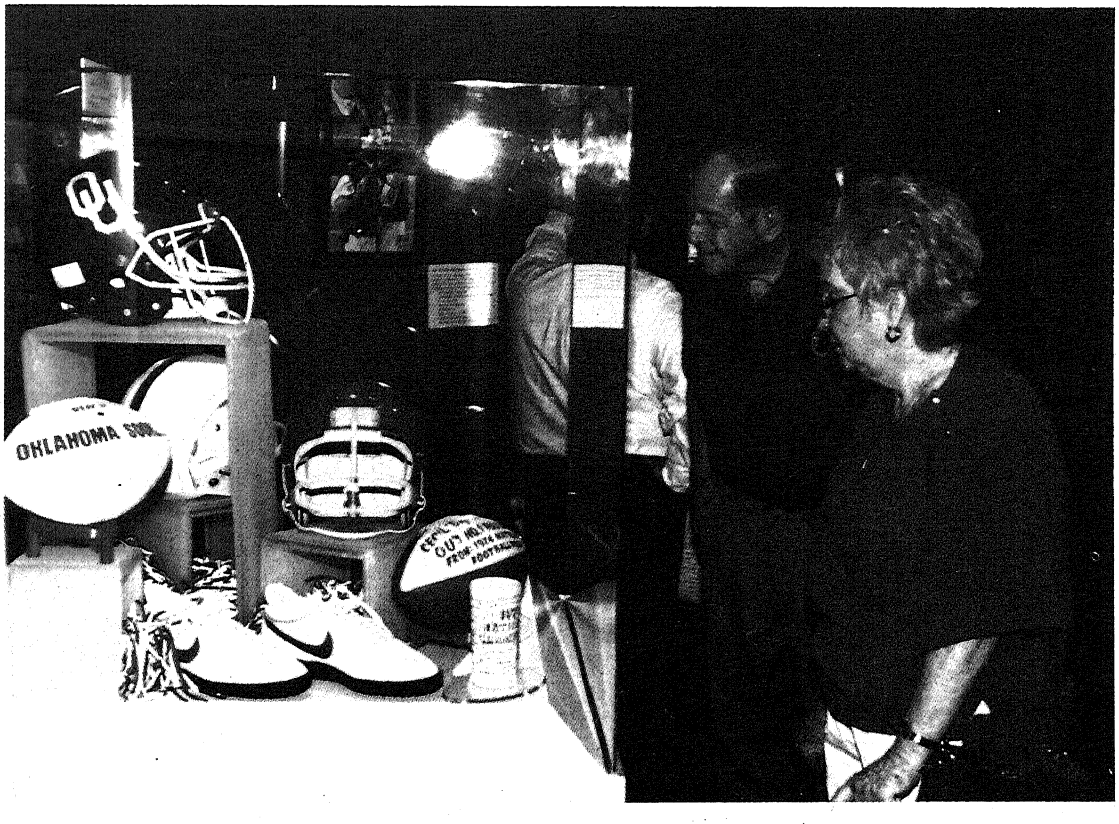

Fig. 3 - An exhibit of sports memorabilia from the University of Oklahoma's football team attracts many new visitors to the museum (Photo by Mike Callaghan, courtesy Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History).

students. The exhibit does have important social, cultural, and political themes that can be explored. Visitors can learn more about the relationship between sports, society and culture. Ads and the media, for example, can tell a great deal about patriotic feelings. During World War II, promotional posters for the football team and the wartime effort featured a caricature of Uncle Sam wearing an OU football helmet.

The SNOMNH also has a long, highly successful, history of reaching the needs of special interest groups such as Native Americans who are a significant portion of Oklahoma's population (8%). Native American languages are disappearing at an alarming rate. The loss ripples far beyond the affected communities. When a language dies, linguists, anthropologists and others lose a rich source of material for their work in documenting a people's history. The world becomes less diverse and creative. In response the SNOMNH has proposed a Native American Language Center. The SNOMNH has received $100,000 from the state to hire a Curator of Native American Languages. The museum will use interactive technology to assist Oklahoma's Native Americans to regain their languages and cultures by linking their cultural centers with our collections of Native American materials. Our goal is to use the Museum's facilities to preserve, research, teach and interpret Native American languages for the benefit of all. The Museum's collection of Native American objects will be a key in teaching languages. The Museum also will establish an audio archive of languages by recording native speakers and preserving relevant audio materials. Our program will serve as a center for the study of Native American languages and a model for university museums in other regions where the intellectual achievements represented by native languages are being lost.

Conclusion

Objects are keys to the university museum's success based on the human characteristics of curiosity and collecting, keeping and handing on objects. University museums must continue to be sensory and emotional places. The museum can be more successful as a social enterprise by combining objects with interactive technology. Every museum needs to create a multidimensional vision and have a two, three, four or more pronged mission. University museums are best suited for providing the synthesis and order for our natural world through research, teaching and public interpretation. University museums also can be more successful if they improve their social capital by providing an increase in networking and other benefits that flow from the museums to their communities.

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